

LOCATION: EDINBURGH VENUE TYPE: CLUB/LIVE VENUE

Cabaret Voltaire

Legendary Edinburgh outfit lets its new level do the talking

At one time Sarah David was the ‘crazy’ girl, precariously roller-skating around the cobbled streets of Edinburgh, brimming with passion for the events she was promoting and delighted to interact with people in a bid to convey her spirited message. That was 1991, these days the roller boots could probably do with a dusting down, but her enthusiasm and passion bubbles at the forefront of everything she does. “I think it’s really important to remember your roots. I never want to be someone that sits in an office and just comes in on a Monday morning and says; how much did we take? I need to be hands on, I care too much not be.” said Sarah. Her partner in crime, Tim Makin, is the epitome of this hands-on approach, dealing more with the technological side of operations during normal service, and project managing the creation of Speakeasy, the exquisite addition to the legendary Cabaret Voltaire, Edinburgh.

Named after the band credited with a significant role in the uprising of electronica in the UK, who in fact named themselves after a Zürich club to complete a circle of sorts, Cabaret Voltaire opened in 2004 as a result of Sarah’s own ambition and Edinburgh’s need for a good small live music venue.

Although the city offers an impressive range of bars, clubs, restaurants and other attractions, it lost out to Glasgow when it came to attracting breaking acts, whose popularity merited a venue with a capacity of roughly 400. The venues that existed in the city were designed with greater numbers in mind, dictating that Edinburgh would only get to see an act when (and if) the act accumulated enough of a following to generate the necessary demand.

“Bands were playing Edinburgh when they got to that 600-1000 people stage, but they weren’t coming when they were just breaking through. Glasgow could boast things like ‘we had Oasis first’ and Edinburgh, the Capital – we were a little behind Glasgow. I made it my mission to try and put Edinburgh firmly on the musical map,” said Sarah.

This competitive focus may stem from Glasgow being Sarah’s birthplace, and it is certainly propelled by her experiences and deep involvement in the late night industry, an involvement that began with the small decision to quit her medical studies to take on the role of manager at the Liquid Rooms, now an established live venue/club in the city. By introducing live music to the Liquid Rooms, bringing in countless international acts and

showcasing her own events, all the while impressing her captivating personality on others, she built a formidable reputation in the city, which armed her suitably to launch Cabaret Voltaire.

“I wanted my own space, to do my own thing, I felt the time was right. Three and a half years ago Festival Inns approached me to say they had this space (available for lease), which was doing nothing. I had been promoting under the remit of someone else’s business but I wanted to take a chance and do my own thing,” said Sarah.

The chance paid off, thanks to a lot of hard work, a commitment to live music and some innovative scheduling, and then, in true keeping with ambitious tendencies, the goal posts moved again. A night out in the Summer of 2007, when Sarah and her group opted for home, rather than facing the masses in the club, gifted her with the realisation that Cabaret Voltaire could be developed, as she explained: “Basically as you get older, you still want the same underground music, but you want a seat, you want to have a conversation and you want a nice drink, minus the ten deep at the bar. But you perhaps don’t want to go down the corporate route of George St, that’s why we built this.” ▶

► Speakeasy has been developed on the floor above the original club and whilst downstairs is raw and earthy in its aesthetic, the new development, done in a Prohibition style, breathes with an air of sophistication that stays true to the history of the building and of the Old Town area of the city. Sarah and Tim worked closely with Grum and Michael at Dynamic Productions, also collaborating with Sketch Graphics in a design process, which was conceived and evolved through a true amalgamation of ideas.

Grum from Dynamic Productions described the brief: "It was very important to design something that would not make anyone feel uncomfortable due to age or style preference. Influences came from bank floors, which always have the wow factor and Italian furniture, especially looking at mafia style drinking dens during the Prohibition in America. I suppose it is how I imagined a very underground bar would've looked then, when a lot of money was available and clients had very high standards."

The new development offers an all seated capacity of 120, bolstering the overall limit to 600 people. Customers book tables in advance, which typically accounts for three quarters of the room, leaving the rest to be snapped up on a first-come, first-served basis. Operationally, Speakeasy works like a restaurant in that it doesn't cost to book a table, table service is provided and there is no standing, allowing a clear path for interaction between the different groups. Tables are 'owned' for the night, allowing people to enjoy the acts playing downstairs, through filtered live visuals and audio or by venturing down below, safe in the knowledge that on their return they are assured a seat to rest their dancing feet.

The room is divided into two, with a small but functionally astute bar serving area, free of draught pumps to allow the space for cocktail mixologists to perform. The right hand area is an open space, punctuated by supporting stone pillars, roofed by stunning metallic tiles, which incidentally match those in the Empire State Building, and headed by one-way windows looking out onto Blair St. This area houses specially designed, mini-banquet tables to seat up to 14 people, and proved to be a pleasing aspect of the project for Grum: "I am pleased with all the project and probably especially the tables, due to the fact we designed them during our first group meeting, and stuck to the plan. I think they have a real quality and richness to them."

An intimate cavern forms the second half of Speakeasy, sunken bunker seating flanks the central 'catwalk', which is proving popular with the exhibitionists, quick to capitalise on the focal position of the walkway. The detailed stonework in the concave roof, over the seating, carried out by Sandy at A.J Construction, provides a stunning feature that is accentuated by the clever use of LED lighting and highlights the thought and work that has gone into the entire project.

"Dynamic Productions specialises in LED

lighting and wanted to use this opportunity to prove LED lighting doesn't have to be considered as a synthetic constantly colour-changing product. We used amber, as it works perfectly to light the stonework, a main feature in the bar," said Grum.

Dynamic Productions also carried out the audio installation, working closely with Tim, to create a sound that complimented the laid back, yet vibrant surroundings. A KV2 system was preferred, due to its ability to produce the desired sound and its subtle appearance, respectful of the design elements. "We sought more of a warm sound, like a large home stereo rather than a crisp, more harsh club system – quite a warm sounding system," said Tim.

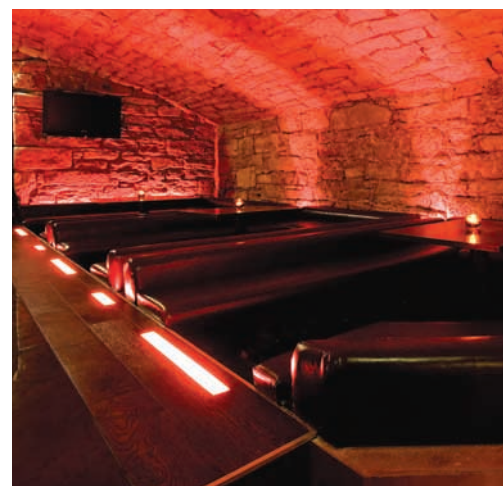
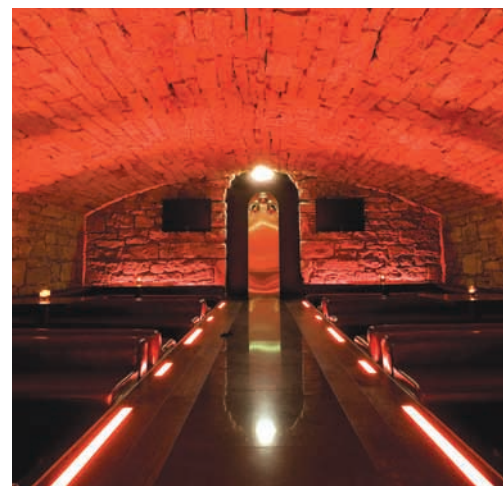
The project, which began in August 2007, reached completion on Christmas Eve, having incurred a number of snags along the way. Building Control had to be satisfied before any work could take place due to the historic protection placed on the building, which is positioned in close proximity to the Castle, just off the Royal Mile. Certain stipulations had to be satisfied to ensure the development remained legitimate, whilst some tasks originally predicted to take two days, took two weeks, as Tim and his team worked tirelessly to protect the integrity of the building and everyone's safety.

"It's very true to the Old Town; we've not tried to plaster over beautiful stone walls, it's very important to me to be aware of your surroundings, aware of your history and be true to it – don't try and mask these gorgeous parts of the building," said Sarah.

The events program at Cabaret Voltaire is relentless and diverse, working with national and local promoters to showcase emerging and established acts, with the club running seven nights a week. Sarah is as committed to helping young people out as she is to keeping prices down – recently putting Andy Wetherall on for free on a midweek night, his 'best midweek night ever'.

So what next for the girl with the roller-skates and the bag full of ambition? There are plans for Speakeasy to be promoted further into corporate events, a revenue stream that the new sumptuous surroundings opens; the space has already been used for wedding receptions, finishing schools for drinks companies and by 50 French Diplomats on a recent visit to the Scottish Capital.

Sarah works closely with Edinburgh City Council, chairing the Old Town Business Association and the UNIGHT initiative, put in place to ensure a secure and safe drinking environment for the people of Edinburgh. She hopes to delve further into a passion for large scale, outdoor events and somewhere she'll find time to enjoy Speakeasy, especially the tailored cocktail menu. Above all, she is sure to continue working with her enthusiasm and passion, firmly on her sleeve: "The venue is atmospheric, that's why the bands love it, the DJs love it and the people love it." ■



VITAL STATISTICS

Cabaret Voltaire
36 - 38 Blair St
Edinburgh
EH1 1QR
Tel: 0131 220 6176
Owner: Sarah David & Tim Makin

Hours

Mon-Sun 11pm - 3am // Live gigs vary

Key Contractors

Interior Designer: Dynamic Productions // **Quantity Surveyor:** A.J Construction // **Architect:** Format Design // **Main Contractor:** A.J Construction // **Light, Sound and Visual Installation:** Dynamic Productions // **Seating & Upholstery:** Dynamic Productions // **Flooring:** Dynamic Productions // **EPoS Provider:** Zonal // **Graphic Design:** Sketch Graphics

Drinks (Speakeasy)

Pouring brands: Grey Goose vodka, Tanqueray 10 gin, Monkey Shoulder bourbon, Myers rum, Patron tequila // **Premium draught lager:** n/a // **Standard draught lager:** n/a // **Lead PPL:** £3 (Tiger) // **Lead PPS:** n/a // **Cocktail list:** Yes

Technology

Sound system (Speakeasy): 6 x KV2 8" speakers, 2 x KV2 15" subs, Mackie DFX-6 desk, Behringer Ultra Curve, 2 x Technics 1210s, 2 x Pioneer CDJ-1000s, 1 x Allen & Heath Xone:02 // **Lighting:** LED lighting, 1 x DMX controller // **Visual:** 3 x 42" plasma TVs, 1 x video projector